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UNCLAS RANGOON 000399

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SUBJECT: BURMA AI UPDATE - MARCH 23

REF: RANGOON 372

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY. FAO Bangkok reported a possible new AI outbreak among poultry in Shan State, but local contacts have not yet been able to confirm. Foreign donors have yet to respond to the GOB's request for additional assistance, although Australian animal testing equipment en route before the AI outbreak is in transit. A major commercial chicken breeder in Burma told us that chicken infection and mortality rates in Burma are lower than in most AI outbreaks, and may provide clues on how the virus entered the country. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) Local contacts had no information about a reported new AI outbreak among poultry in Shan State. FAO Bangkok reported that the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries (MLF) dispatched an investigation team to Shan State this week. MLF informed FAO Rangoon they had not sent a team to investigate because they understood the outbreak was not AI. FAO and WHO could not get a clear answer on how they "understood."

[1](#)3. (U) FAO Representative Tang Zhengping provided Charge an update on assistance promised. FAO Rome had provided \$45,000 to purchase PPEs and disinfectant. U.S. donated assistance of 200 PPEs, 500 liters of disinfectant and 50 sprayers had been distributed already to Livestock and Fishery officials in Mandalay. The ADB will provide \$1 million to FAO and WHO in Burma for emergency uses. The Chinese have "tentatively agreed" to provide "some materials," which Tang could not expand upon.

[1](#)4. (U) An Australian Embassy official told us that some animal laboratory testing equipment is now in transit to Burma. This equipment is not in response to the recent AI outbreak, but was already "in the pipeline," when it occurred.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Our FSN agriculture specialist spoke to a contact at Charoen Pokphand (CP), a leading Thai commercial chicken company with several poultry farms near Rangoon. The contact, U Soe Lwin, is also a member of Burma's Veterinary Council. He noted that only 10-20 percent of chickens tested in outbreak zones in Burma were AI positive, compared to results closer to 100 percent positive in cases in neighboring countries. He also noted that mortality rates of chickens in Burma are lower than regional rates. The source claimed that most chickens that tested positive for AI in Burma were day-old chicks that usually originate in Yunnan, China. He suspects that the infected chicks were smuggled as eggs into Burma from China after suspected outbreaks in Yunnan. The infected chicks are reportedly of the Backok breed primarily found in China.

[1](#)6. (U) WHO Burma will hold an AI update meeting on March 28 to brief diplomatic missions, UN agencies, and NGOs on current conditions. Briefers will include WHO, FAO, the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, and the Ministry of Health.

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